

# ALLERGIES

Arizona Department of Corrections  
Health Service Bureau

Inmate Wellness Program  
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Sneezing, scratchy eyes, runny or stuffy nose, itchy skin, difficulty breathing ... it could be caused by allergies. An allergy happens when a foreign substance that the body does not tolerate enters the body and irritates it. Common irritants that bother the body can be food, plants, animals, insects, or man-made things like plastic and medications. These irritants enter our bodies by breathing, eating or touching them.

## TYPES OF ALLERGIES

**Medication:** When health care providers ask about allergies, they want to know about your specific allergies to medications. Symptoms included with allergies to medications are difficulty breathing and skin rash. Stomach aches or headaches are NOT allergic reactions to a medication. This difference is important. A true allergy means that the medication can not be taken even if it is the best treatment for the problem. An allergy to a medication can be from the drug itself or from how the medication is made, for instance different animal by-products or food dyes used. It is important to know about your medication allergies because they can be very serious and can even cause death.

**Food:** Often with food allergies the tongue and mouth swell, hives or skin rash appear, or difficulty breathing occurs. To prevent a food allergy avoid the particular food product. Allergic reactions to food need medical attention right away.

**General allergies:** Includes allergies to plants, animals, insects, dust, etc. that often can cause sneezing, itchy, watery eyes, runny or stuffy nose. These signs can be treated with medications bought at the inmate store.

Your body usually must come in contact with the irritant two times before it mounts a strong allergic attack. In the first contact, the body identifies the irritant. It then produces a general defense for that irritant now called an allergen because your body responds to it with an allergic reaction. By the time of the second contact, your body is alert for that specific allergen. The 2<sup>nd</sup> contact leads to a faster and stronger defensive response.

## YOUR BODY'S REACTION

The body protects itself by what is called an immune system. The immune system is a group of

body parts that work together to keep the body healthy. Its job is to know what belongs in the body and what doesn't. Then it starts different ways of removing things that don't belong in the body. The body then tries to rid itself of what is bothering it through different means, though not always effective:

- ***Sneezing*** causes a large force of air out of the body to blow out the allergen.
- ***Scratchy or itchy*** eyes causes the eyes to tear to try to wash out the allergen.
- ***Runny or stuffy nose*** is the body trying to clean out the nose.
- ***Skin rash*** is your body trying another attempt to remove the allergen.

## TREATMENT AVAILABLE FOR RELIEF

The best treatment is to avoid the allergen all together. If this is not possible, you have other options available to help your body cleanse itself of the allergen for relief:

- Drink plenty of water.
- Showering, good personal hygiene.
- Washing or rinsing of the eyes with water.

Medications can also be taken to relieve the body's system during allergy attacks. Your health care provider may prescribe some medications, however, the medications discussed in this section can be bought at the inmate store. (NO prescription is needed from your health care provider for these medications)



▪ **Antihistamines** are a group of medications used to stop sneezing, itching, and runny nose. They "dry up" the body. This means, it is important to drink plenty of water when taking these medications.

▪ **"Salt water" (saline) nose spray** is helpful for a stuffy nose. It is also helpful for a dry nose. Dry noses can crack and bleed.

Keeping control of your allergies is a great way to improve your comfort level on a day to day basis. Remember the control is in your hands.